

# GRAND JURY HEARS OF JAIL BRUTALITY FROM EX-CONVICTS

Lack of Proper Food and Exercise at Holmesburg Prison Described

## STATEMENTS BACKED UP BY FACTS AND FIGURES

Former Prisoner Asserts He Was Crippled for Life by Severe Punishment

Tales of brutality, lack of proper food and punishment for the slightest offense were unfolded by former inmates of the county prison at Holmesburg who appeared this afternoon before the Grand Jury which is making an investigation of the institution.

Several of the witnesses testified there were long periods when all the convicts were deprived of any form of exercise. Statements of most of the prisoners were backed up with dates and figures.

John Saxon, a full-blooded Choctaw Indian, who left the prison November 28, after serving a term of three and a half years, said that as the result of the punishment inflicted by his convicted countrymen at the institution a keeper he will be crippled for life.

### Left Without Attention

"My right shoulder was broken by a blackjack owing to one of these men," Saxon said to have testified. "I was so bad they had to let me out, and left me there for three weeks without medical attention. When I did receive attention my wounds were in such condition that they did not respond to the treatment."

"I received over 5000 floggs and it was of very poor quality. The naked matters worse. I was kept in solitary confinement."

"They of last Friday in Negro and placed me in what is known as 'Blow II,' where Negro prisoners are confined. I insisted that I was an Indian, but they refused to believe me. I informed the inmates of the keeper beatings and the objection to the quarters and the terrible manner immediately after I got into the cell, and I was sent to the 10th Street Attorney."

Other inmates testified that at one time there was a stretch of 324 hours in the prison during which time no exercise of any kind was permitted.

The investigation of the grand jury is making rapid progress. A large number of new testimony was disclosed through the statements of former inmates how an iron-fisted discipline was used to crush out even occasional laughter among the imprisoned men.

The Grand Jury and the grandwreck for its investigation Wednesday by the most expeditious and searching scrutiny ever made in the prison at Holmesburg. The jurors visited the jail cells and the various parts of the building where some were permitted to be hearing when convicts were questioned in their cells.

The answers received by the jurors caused a decision to summon a number of convicts now in the County Prison to the Grand Jury next week Day 12. These men, it is understood, are those serving solitary confinement, and some runners. Testimony was given yesterday afternoon and last evening from inmates, who were then subpoenaed.

**Better Care Is Assured.**

All the disclosures made of conditions in the Holmesburg Prison were seconded by Commissioner of Public Works of the State War Department, who asserted that the prison has been reformed to change the rules so far, beginning January 1, so that cells will be unbroken, and the men may have a chance and opportunity with one another. A more liberal and varied diet of fare is to be provided.

The "Holmesburg Gang" was one of the physical results of the oppressive measures adopted to reduce the men in the prison to low standards after hours, before the new standards were put into effect.

Commissioner Brady has suggested the inspectors to provide an opportunity to exercise in the open air for two hours daily and Sunday. They are also to be allowed to exercise in the exercise in place of running and bending for inmates, who are longer confined.

There was no objection from members of the board that the new panel meeting suggested by Dr. R. H. Ford be held in the daytime, to give the board more time for a meeting before the regular one scheduled for the second Monday in January.

It was anticipated that Dr. Rector would be called before the grand jury before its investigation of conditions at Holmesburg was complete.

Dr. Joseph M. Reeves, 1000 Spring street, surgeon of the forces, has asserted what he was told by former of Dr. Rector.

Frank M. Kinsella, a member of the board, said last night he had received no notice of a meeting before the regular one scheduled for the second Monday in January.

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The jurors sat down in the meeting and throughout the afternoon, listening to testimony of former inmates, including testimony of men serving the early part of next year. The report of Judge Anderson, who ordered the investigation, it is believed, will not be ready before next Wednesday or Thursday.

One of the witnesses yesterday was Frank A. Voss, of 411 S. 10th street, who was passed and sent on the Veil. After his discharge from the army and came he was still suffering from his injuries he was sentenced to six months in the county jail for aggravated assault and battery.

He said his offense was due largely to his illness at the time, that the Court would not consider that part of his defense.

I spent from April to September of 1921 in the Holmesburg jail, he said. I was under the care of a physician ever since. The food at the prison was unfit to eat. I became sick at many a dish. When I first reached the jail I was ill and ran down. I suffered continually with indigestion and bronchitis brought about by the gassing I received in France. I asked for air and exercise, but my request was entirely disregarded. The doctor did not even take my temperature when I asked him. He asked me what the trouble was and gave me some pills. That was the end of it.

"When Doctor Reeves entered one day I tried to tell him the pain I was

in. But he only sniffed the air for traces of tobacco smoke and left. I was a Government pensioner then. But after I went in training and arrived in the care of an army doctor. But I could rather be many a German prison camp I knew of than be in the place of those poor beggars who are kept there now."

"The first softness of the day was Paney Cuneo, who was paroled after serving eight months of a year's sentence. He was the prison barber. He asserted he was deprived of food twenty-four hours because he talked to another inmate.

The law requiring all prisoners in the county jail to undergo the punishment of solitary confinement would be suspended, according to Benjamin K. Goldfarb, a member of the Legislature. Mr. Goldfarb is preparing to draft a bill to supersede the act passed in 1853.

"I do not believe that a man should be sent to prison for a crime he committed unless he can be proved to interest himself in such outside matters as he desired."

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The Democratic Committee for a time threatened to be rent by a bitter factional battle over the judgeship and presidentship. State Committeeman Edward J. Crist and County Committeeman Edward Allard sought to reserve the privilege of making the corporation personally, but former County Committeeman John H. Holday, who led the fight for Porch, won a vote to have the committee make the improvements. Joseph J. Summerill, Jr., of Woodbury, was endorsed for the proprietorship with William T. Williams, Mayor of Woodbury, and John Wanaamaker, New York.

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